## SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS

Special parish celebrations for the disabled may be scheduled each year. By having such celebrations, the parish affirms its oneness with the disabled.

Scripture services, evening of prayer, communal anointing of the sick and reconciliation are examples of such celebrations.

**Who leads the celebration?**

…persons gifted with sensitivity, awareness of life experience and lived Christian faith.

From this conviction parish leadership calls forth many leaders for such celebrations. Integral to and essential for these celebrations will be the talents of those gifted in music, gesture and movement, the art of contemplative prayer and silence and of gracious hospitality.

**Where does the celebration happen?**

Sensitivity to the arrangement of the space will be determined by the needs of the specific groups celebrating such as the deaf, the blind and those with mobility difficulties.

The design or plan takes into account such factors as accessibility, the ability to move freely within the space chosen, the space available to arrange pictures, lights, flowers and audio visual aids.

**When does the celebration occur?**

The decision will be conditioned by factors such as: the experience of the group, the liturgical season, the availability of parents, children and friends to be present for the celebration.

**What is celebrated?**

Planning the "focus" of the celebration is an important consideration. The expressed wishes of the group help to unfold the lived experience of the gospel.

A parish, for example, could arrange a reconciliation celebration in which it will ask forgiveness for its limitations in not seeing and accepting others including the disabled.

## SYMBOLS AND GESTURES

Appropriate choice of symbols and gestures used in celebration require discretion and attention to the needs of the group celebrating.

**Questions include:**

a. What Scripture readings and texts are most helpful to the assembled group? Why?

b. What symbols such as the cross, pictures, flowers, incense, light, best help the participants enter the spirit of celebration?

c. What gestures (the sign of the cross, greeting of peace, the laying on of hands, ashes placed on the forehead, the sprinkling of blessed water) help participants express and reinforce faith?

d. What is the contribution made by the use of mime, "little dramas," dance, as ways of expressing the message of the readings, song and reflection?

e. How is creative silence best used in realizing that the "land of silence" (*Ps* 94.17) is where the journey of faith leads to happiness and blessedness?

f. What value is placed upon storytelling as a communication form which unlocks the memories of faith and life?

g. What postures are best suited to help express faith? Standing, sitting, kneeling, bowing?

h. What creative imagination present within the group can be expressed in drawing, artwork, sculpture?

*At Worship with the Disabled* Liturgical Leaflet edited by the National Liturgy Office and published by Publications Service, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2500 Don Reid Drive, Ottawa, ON. K1H 2J2 Canada.
Copyright © Concacan Inc., 1987, 2002, 2006. All rights reserved. This text may be reproduced for personal or parish use. For commercial licence, please contact the publisher.

# AT WORSHIP WITH THE DISABLED

We are the clay and you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
*Isaiah* 64.8

National Liturgy Office
CCCB
2500 Don Reid Drive
Ottawa, ON. K1H 2J2 Canada
Copyright © Concacan Inc., 1981, 2002, 2006
E-mail: liturgy@cccb.ca
Phone: 1-613.241.9461 Ext. 223

*This leaflet text was originally prepared in 1981 to commemorate the International Year of the Disabled. Its edited text is presented here as continuing pastoral resource.*

The emerging and growing sensitivity of the parish community to all its members, including the disabled, opens many new liturgical doors for authentic worship.

**Sunday:** The Sunday assembly gathers all to celebrate the Eucharist, "the source and summit of the whole of the Church's worship and of the Christian life." It gathers the weak, the strong; the able, the disabled; the suffering, the healthy; the poor, and the rich.

The talents, the imaginations, the hearts and voices of all are important to the assembly. The Eucharistic gathering stands in a posture of praise and thanksgiving – acceptance in the midst of rejection, joy in the midst of sorrow.

The parish Sunday assembly invites all to renew the gospel effort in the name of the baptized in the Lord. The Sunday assembly calls all members of the community to participate with grace and dignity in the celebration of Eucharist.

**Leadership:** The leaders of the celebrating parish bear the special obligation of calling forth the response of all, including the disabled. In turn all become alerted anew to their mission to minister unto one another. The involvement of the disabled in liturgical ministry is accepted in the true Spirit of joy and hope.

**The ministry of all:** The ministry of the disabled, for and with the praying parish community, is one in which the beautiful uniqueness of all is celebrated. The special gifts of all, including the disabled, help a chorus of praise and thanksgiving rise to the God of all life.

## POSSIBILITIES FOR PARTICIPATION

Any liturgical celebration gives opportunities for the disabled to participate actively as liturgical ministers.

**Some of these opportunities within the Eucharistic celebration are:**

1. readers (a blind person may read from the Braille Scripture);
2. greeters/ushers;
3. cantors, choir members;
4. instrumentalists;
5. special ministers of the Eucharist (a disabled person seated in a wheelchair may give Communion);
6. participants in the offering of the gifts;
7. prayer of the faithful;
8. artists, helpers in arranging space;
9. participants in homily preparation.

In turn the strength and power of all to minister within the community is affirmed.

**Questions flowing from this awareness:**

"How do we accept our ministry?"
"How do we bring the experience of life to others?"
"Do we all accept our handicaps?"
"Do we appreciate and enjoy our uniqueness?"
"Do we appreciate the talents and gifts of others?"
"Are we conscious that deep within all lies the presence of Christ?"

"An act of merciful love is only really such when we are deeply convinced at the moment we perform it that we are at the same time receiving mercy from the people who are accepting it from us." – John Paul II

## LITURGICAL PLANNING

Flowing from this is the contribution the disabled bring to the planning and celebrating of parish liturgies with other members of the parish. This is true in regard to the Sunday celebration, the celebration of reconciliation, morning and evening prayer, parish devotional and prayer life and retreat times.

The parish worship committee, centred in hospitality, invites the disabled to journey with them as the liturgies are planned. In this greeting or invitation extended and accepted, the disabled become "insiders" and planners rather than "outsiders" for whom planning is undertaken. In this atmosphere of mutual hospitality the needs of the disabled are heard. Further, the gifts of the disabled are offered and presented to the parish as it comes together as a praying community of thanksgiving and praise.

**Questions the parish worship committee may ask the disabled include:**

what are your needs?
do you feel welcome and at home in the parish?
how can we better welcome you?
how can you contribute to parish worship?

This openness to the gifts of the disabled, as well as the ability to listen are indispensable for authentic parish worship.

Involvement of the disabled in liturgical planning may well uncover talents that are lacking within the community. This may be true in regard to instruments and music for worship, artistic talent bringing forth creative designs to beautify the space of worship, movements and gestures that are expressions of the inner person.

In summary liturgy planning formed by the gospel allows many to be artisans of their destiny and glory.